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AD HOC COMMITTEE ON THE INDIAN OCEAN

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 445th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Tuesday, 1 July 1997, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. DE SILVA (Sri Lanka)

CONTENTS

OTHER MATTERS

IMPLEMENTATION OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 51/51 OF 16 DECEMBER 1996 (continued)

(a) GENERAL DISCUSSION OF THE FUTURE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE

(b) RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE COMMITTEE FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY (continued)

REPORT OF THE AD HOC COMMITTEE TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY AT ITS FIFTY-SECOND SESSION (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.30 a.m.

OTHER MATTERS

1. The CHAIRMAN drew attention to the need to realize the greatest possible savings on the costs of the work of the Committee, and invited members to express their views on the need to continue the provision of summary records of its meetings.

2. Mr. BABAR (Pakistan) said that summary records were extremely useful, and not providing summary records would hardly solve the problem of the Organization's lack of financial resources. Perhaps it could be agreed to prepare records in a somewhat more condensed form, but nevertheless, he attached great importance to the summary records of the Committee's meetings and believed they were necessary.

3. Mr. NAKKAWITA (Sri Lanka) said that it would be useful in addressing that issue to know the specific amount that would be saved in the event that summary records were no longer provided.

4. The CHAIRMAN said that the savings would amount to around US$ 6,000.

5. Mr. AGAM (Malaysia) said that he found it helpful to have summary records of the work of the Committee, since otherwise future members would have difficulty figuring out what results had been achieved. He supported the continued provision of summary records, although in a more concise form.

6. Mr. HARTHY (Oman) said that summary records were valuable for those delegations which for one reason or another could not participate in some meetings of the Committee.

7. The CHAIRMAN suggested that the provision of summary records should continue.

8. It was so decided.

IMPLEMENTATION OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 51/51 OF 16 DECEMBER 1996 (continued)

(a) GENERAL DISCUSSION OF THE FUTURE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE

(b) RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE COMMITTEE FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY (continued)

9. Mr. BABAR (Pakistan) said that Pakistan believed in the goals of international peace and security, and at the regional level had put forward a number of initiatives to achieve it. The Committee was an important forum for assisting in the establishment of peace, security and stability in the Indian Ocean region. The Chairman had, at the previous meeting, made valuable and important suggestions which Pakistan fully supported. Those suggestions would be implemented without detriment to the 1971 Declaration on the Indian Ocean as

a Zone of Peace, which was directed towards the establishment of a regime allowing more reliable security for the countries of the region.

10. Currently, long-standing disputes and continuing civil unrest in the Indian Ocean region and its subregions risked escalating into tragic conflicts. It was well known that peace and security in the Indian Ocean region were threatened by Powers, both outside the region and within, which had hegemonistic designs. The important initiatives taken over recent days and months to settle disputes in the region could, in the event of their vigourous and committed implementation, make possible the establishment of the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace. The regional security mechanism to be established in the Indian Ocean must stipulate procedures for the settlement of disputes in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and the decisions of the international community as embodied in United Nations resolutions. That would also be assisted by a policy of renouncing domination and hegemony, measures to limit conventional weapons, the maintenance of a reasonable balance between the naval and land forces of littoral and hinterland States, securing the nuclear-free status of the region, the assumption of obligations regarding the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and guarantees by the nuclear Powers to respect the status of the region as a nuclear-weapon-free zone.

11. In order to carry out the tasks before the Committee, it was necessary, as the Chairman had stated, to look at the issues on a broader-based front. Security could be understood on many levels and included both military and non-military aspects. A whole series of regional initiatives had already been taken to expand cooperation among Governments of the Indian Ocean region, including Australia, which was making notable efforts to unite the countries of the region. Although the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation, did not include all the countries of the region, it had achieved some progress. The participation of countries in such initiatives was of substantial significance. A study of existing regional mechanisms could be very helpful to the work of the Committee. That could be done on the basis of an exchange of views among members of the Committee regarding those mechanisms.

12. The Committee should submit for the consideration of the General Assembly its programme of work for the next several years. At its 1998 session, the Committee could focus its attention on achieving consensus on a broader concept of peace and security. In order to hold purposeful discussions, the Committee must request the Secretariat to prepare an informal paper. At its 1999 session, the Committee could work on formulating principles and directives which would lay the foundations for cooperation strategies. In the year 2000, it could make an attempt to define frameworks for cooperation on all the issues and study the possibility of convening another conference of littoral and hinterland States.

13. Ms. HAMILTON (Australia) said that she had not been aware that summary records of the work of the Committee had been provided in 1996. Providing summary records would make sense if the Committee actually engaged in discussion of substantive issues. Since it was currently in the process of discussing the nature of its work in the future, summary records of its meetings did not appear to be really necessary. The Committee could return to that question when it considered its report.

14. Ms. LINGAYA (Madagascar) said that her delegation supported the Ad Hoc Committee's efforts to seek ways of achieving the objectives of peace, security and stability in the Indian Ocean region, and noted with satisfaction the Chairman's remarks at the previous meeting re-emphasizing the importance of continuing efforts to ensure the participation of the permanent members of the Security Council and the major maritime users of the Indian Ocean in the Ad Hoc Committee's work. All countries needed to actively participate in elaborating strategies and measures designed to ensure effective cooperation on the issues of peace and security, including both military and non-military aspects, and particularly the issue of the possible inclusion in the Declaration of the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace of the current initiatives designed to strengthen economic, trade and technical cooperation between the countries of the region.

15. It would therefore be logical to start by elaborating a document on confidence-building measures specifically for the Indian Ocean region. In that connection, her delegation viewed with interest the proposal that an informal paper prepared by the Secretariat should serve as a starting point; such a document would contain the new approaches and be based on existing United Nations documents in that field.

16. The proposal put forward by the representative of Australia regarding the organization of the Committee's work in the light of the current financial difficulties deserved close scrutiny. A more substantive discussion of that issue should be held at the appropriate time. Meanwhile, her delegation supported the proposal that the Chairman of the Committee should be given the opportunity to hold informal consultations with Committee members and the major maritime users of the Indian Ocean, and that the matter should be placed on the agenda of the next session.

17. Mr. HASMY (Malaysia) said that according to General Assembly resolution 51/51 of 10 December 1996, the Committee had been mandated to examine its future work and make recommendations for consideration by the General Assembly at its fifty-second session.

18. That mandate had been precipitated by questions regarding the relevance of the Ad Hoc Committee's work. Those questions were justified in the context of the ongoing reforms at the United Nations. If the achievement of concrete and visible results was the sole criterion, it would be difficult to justify the Committee's existence.

19. In reviewing the work and objectives of the Ad Hoc Committee in the current climate, his delegation was also cognizant of other regional initiatives in respect of the Indian Ocean, such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation of which Malaysia was a member. However, to the extent that the above-mentioned initiative and others like it were largely trade- or economic-related and did not address peace and security issues, his delegation believed that the work of the Ad Hoc Committee had continued relevance. Corrections should be made to the Committee's work in the light of the new realities that had emerged at the global and regional level, realities which were characterized by the emergence of regional initiatives and organizations. In addition, the end of the cold war should not be a justification for

diminishing the concept of the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace. In that context, the 1971 Declaration, the objectives of which had been to ensure the security of the Indian Ocean region, continued to be relevant. Furthermore, the Committee had elaborated new alternative approaches to achieve those objectives.

20. The Committee should derive benefits from its diverse membership united by a single aspiration, namely the security of the Indian Ocean region. It remained an important forum to conduct dialogue for assurances of peaceful intentions and cooperation in the region. The difficulties faced by some States in participating and supporting the Committee's work should not be an impediment in the continuing work of such an important forum.

21. In order to revitalize and increase the relevance of its work, it would be useful for the Committee to focus its attention on United Nations resolutions on development, environment, the law of the sea and ocean affairs, and also conventions of the International Maritime Organization, in order to promote harmonization and ensure that regional cooperation in the context of the Indian Ocean was in line with global aspirations and conventions. Ways should also be sought to expand cooperation between the Committee and the relevant United Nations agencies and programmes and other regional organizations.

22. Mr. NAYECK (Mauritius) said that the ending of the cold war and of the super-Power rivalry in the Indian Ocean region made it necessary to seek new approaches to achieving the objective of turning the Indian Ocean into a zone of peace. Despite the fact that east-west confrontation was no longer a source of instability in the region, the emergence of new destabilizing problems such as drug trafficking, illegal trade in light firearms, and the growth in arsenals of conventional weapons were a cause for concern. Foreign vessels were continuing to fish the waters of the Indian Ocean, taking advantage of the fact that many Indian Ocean coastal States did not have a developed fishing industry. Many small States did not have the resources to monitor their exclusive economic zone. In order to prevent the predatory exploitation of the region's resources, it would make sense to establish a monitoring mechanism to enable countries to exchange information about illegal trawling.

23. His delegation reiterated its gratitude to the two permanent members of the Security Council which had continued to participate in and support the Committee's work. At the same time, the absence of the three other Powers and their unwillingness to participate in the Committee's work was regrettable. The presence of the permanent members of the Security Council and the major maritime users of the Indian Ocean would enhance the effectiveness of the Committee's work. The Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation had held its first ministerial meeting in Mauritius in March 1997 and adopted its charter, the basic principles of which were respect for sovereign equality, territorial integrity and political independence, non-interference in internal affairs, peaceful coexistence and mutual advantage. The Association's objectives would be to promote the stable and balanced development of the region and the Member States and to establish a common basis for regional and economic cooperation.

24. His delegation joined with the representative of Australia in stressing that the Association was primarily an economic cooperation organization and had no pretensions to discuss security problems and political issues. It had

absolutely no intention of replacing the Ad Hoc Committee or arrogating to itself any part of the Ad Hoc Committee's agenda. The question of enlarging the membership of the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation was being actively considered by a working group of seven of the Association's Member States.

25. The establishment of a zone of peace in the Indian Ocean was the shared obligation of all States.

26. Mr. PARNOHADININGRAT (Indonesia) said that the Ad Hoc Committee had largely succeeded in identifying new alternative approaches as called for by the General Assembly resolutions. Taken together, those approaches contained a wide range of concrete and pragmatic proposals for ensuring peace, security and stability in the Indian Ocean region, thus reflecting the profound changes that had taken place globally and regionally in the post-cold-war era. The pioneering work of a number of regional organizations also merited closer attention. In South-East Asia and elsewhere, dialogues had been initiated to broaden the concept of security into a comprehensive approach.

27. All of that led his delegation to expect that those positive developments would be complemented by progress in the Committee's work, which had long been characterized by stalemate. Progress had been stymied by a number of factors, not least of which was the non-participation in the Committee's work of certain major maritime users of the Indian Ocean which insisted on naval autonomy and unilateralism in disregard of the consequences for States in the zone. The importance of maintaining peace and stability in the Indian Ocean was obvious in the light of its strategic location, but the concept of the Zone of Peace could not be implemented in a climate of insecurity and uncertainty attendant upon unrestrained naval activities.

28. Nevertheless, the interests of various States could be reconciled given the political will to do so, thereby leading to a balanced relationship which should be transparent so as to facilitate better mutual understanding of States' policies, concerns and capabilities and thus ensuring the building of trust between them. In that regard, Indonesia endorsed the approach outlined by the Chairman that discussions should be initiated on confidence-building measures, among other things. On the basis of consensus with regard to such measures, the Committee could address other issues, in particular cooperation strategies that took account of the interests of all concerned States. It might therefore be useful at the present stage for the Committee to consider holding seminars and workshops to look at all the relevant issues concerning the future of the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace.

29. Indonesia remained hopeful that the three permanent members of the Security Council and other major maritime users of the Indian Ocean would rejoin the Committee and thereby contribute to the harmonization of divergent views and interests. The Committee should continue to play its role until its primary objectives had been met and its mandate fulfilled. The new realities and trends should facilitate a mutually beneficial dialogue under the auspices of the Committee.

30. Mr. PAL (India) said that the original objectives of the 1971 Declaration remained valid. Times had changed, but not the foreign military presence in the Indian Ocean. The Committee's work had been made difficult by the refusal of three permanent members of the Security Council and major maritime users of the Indian Ocean to participate in the Committee's deliberations. Without their participation, progress was obviously impossible. In such circumstances, however, it was necessary to persevere without wasting effort on peripheral issues or questions outside the Committee's mandate. Nor should the search for new and alternative approaches turn into a search for new and alternative goals.

31. At their meeting in New Delhi in April 1997, the ministers of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries had reaffirmed the importance of international cooperation to ensure peace, security and stability in the Indian Ocean region and had urged the Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee to continue his informal consultations designed to persuade the three permanent members of the Security Council and the major maritime users to return to the Committee. The ministers of the Non-Aligned Countries continued to regard such an approach as vitally necessary, and hence they had not requested the Committee to address other issues that would distract its attention from the central task.

32. On the subject of the proposals outlined by the Chairman at the previous meeting regarding the principles and guidelines for confidence-building measures, preventive diplomacy and cooperation for the region, India understood the spirit in which the suggestion had been made, but believed that it was very different from what the non-aligned ministers had envisaged. It followed from the Chairman's suggestion that the Indian Ocean region needed confidence-building measures, which was not really the case. The only region which had needed and negotiated such measures was Europe at the height of the cold war. In the Indian Ocean region, however, most countries had close ties of friendship which were currently being further strengthened through economic cooperation. The Committee should not waste its time or the Secretariat's resources discussing a problem that did not exist.

33. India urged the Chairman to continue his efforts to persuade those who had left the Committee to rejoin it. Assuming that an immediate change of position was unlikely, it might perhaps be useful for the Committee to meet in two years' time in order to take stock of those efforts.

34. Mr. DEHGHANI (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that his Government attached great importance to the work of the Ad Hoc Committee and was of the view that several of the objectives laid down in the 1971 Declaration remained valid. The end of great-Power rivalry had not freed the Indian Ocean region from the foreign military presence which continued to threaten the prosperity and security of the region. Moreover, the international community's legitimate demand for the establishment of a Zone of Peace in the Indian Ocean had thus far been ignored.

35. Significant progress in the Committee's work required the active participation of the permanent members of the Security Council and other major maritime users of the Indian Ocean. While greatly appreciating the Chairman's efforts to ensure their return to the Committee and urging him to continue those

efforts, his delegation nevertheless believed that those States' failure to participate should not prevent the Committee from pressing ahead with its work.

36. Consideration of new alternative approaches was a praiseworthy exercise which should continue. However, the relationship between regional and universal alternative approaches needed to be clarified.

37. The transformation of the Indian Ocean into a zone of peace required a step-by-step approach. As a first step towards that goal, the States located in the Indian Ocean region and subregion should participate in frank dialogue in order to promote peace and security and confidence-building measures in both military and non-military fields. With regard to security issues, problems in bilateral relations between countries of the Indian Ocean region should not hamper multilateral cooperation between them. The Indian Ocean region was more suited to the establishment of confidence- and security-building measures than some other regions of the world.

38. His delegation wished to remind the Committee of its 1993 proposal to review the 1971 Declaration in view of the fact that some of its elements were no longer relevant. It was also necessary to clarify issues of security and stability in the light of post-cold-war developments. In the meantime, the Secretary-General should, with expert assistance, undertake a study with a view to making recommendations on effective measures and approaches to achieve the goals of the 1971 Declaration. One option might be the adoption of a new declaration which would strike a realistic balance between regional and extraregional ideas, concerns, rights and responsibilities. At the same time the Islamic Republic of Iran was flexible on the issue and was prepared to endorse the Chairman's suggestion.

39. Ms. WANG Xiaolin (China) supported the Ad Hoc Committee's work and hoped that other countries would cooperate to ensure that the recent trends in its work were reversed. China greatly appreciated the Chairman's efforts to identify new approaches, and would carefully study the proposals he had made at the previous meeting. Her delegation also welcomed the proposals of other delegations designed to facilitate the Committee's work, and expressed hope that the Committee's work would be successful on the basis of their efforts.

REPORT OF THE AD HOC COMMITTEE TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY AT ITS FIFTY-SECOND SESSION

40. The CHAIRMAN suggested that the draft report of the Ad Hoc Committee, to be issued as document A/52/29, should be circulated among Committee members for their perusal. He would be interested to hear their opinions regarding the draft.

41. Mr. WAHAB (Pakistan) said that his delegation would require time to peruse the text of the draft report.

The meeting rose at 11.20 a.m.